LET FREEDOM RING
AMOS 7:10-17
ACTS 5:17-29

S. send copies to Earl Reshaw, Harvey McKee, Dorothy Karlin (2) - note in Newsletter - copies of "Let Freek Ring" are available.

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Freedom is like the most delicate of flowers: ~~precious~~, beautiful, but so very fragile. Without constant attention freedom withers. With rough handling freedom is crushed. Freedom has been given away in the human story more times than it has been preserved: usually in the name of national security, ~~national~~ defense, stability.

The April 29 issue of Time Magazine included in a section called "American Notes" a brief article that described a project undertaken by a High School class in Oklahoma. The students drew up a petition and took it to the state capitol for their legislators to read and sign. The petition read:

> "In view of Watergate, we the undersigned firmly demand that the Congressmen from Oklahoma support the following article: 'In all criminal prosecutions the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witness against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor; and to have the assistance of Counsel for his defense'."

271 state assemblymen, senators and ~~then~~ their staff persons were asked to sign. 111 refused, dismissing the document as a dubious proposition, poorly worded and probably illegal.

The petition, as I'm sure everyone here recognized immediately, was the sixth amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America.

Several years ago, in another similar experiement a reporter in Madison, Wisconsin took a copy of the Declaration of Independence to a 4th of July Parade. He interviewed 112 people, explained what the document meant and asked them to sign it. Of the 112 people interviewed, one man

signed. The rest thought ~~the document~~ it too radical and revolutionary.

Or, do you recall not long ago the "5th Dimension" singing words from the second paragraph of the Declaration: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among those are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these Rights Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government."

Now its one thing to envision Jefferson writing those words vis a vis the tyranny of British Monarchy: it's another thing to discuss it academically in reference to a certain date in history; but it's an altogether different thing to hear it sung by people who are black and Americans in the middle of a movement called Civil Rights. Under those conditions it sounds frightening, and people - predictably got angry - and called radio stations to stop playing that "commie propoganda."

Freedom is asfragile as a delicate flower. Anxiety, fear, boredom seem at times to conspire against freedom, so that men in the name of Patriotism limit it, and if need be elliminate it.

"In 1966 Congressmen Hibert of the House Armed Services Committee agued that we should 'forget the First Admendment', so that people like Martin Lugher King and Stokely Carmichael could be put in jail - and not one member of the committee disagreed with him." (P.194 R.M. Brown The Pseudonymous of God .)

The apocryphal story is told of Benjamin Franklin on the day the Consititutional Convention in Philadelphia finally adjourned. Franklin was old and sick. He was carried through the large crowd waiting outside. A woman approached him and said: "Dr. Franklin, is it finished?" "It is," he said. "But Dr. Franklin, will it work?" "That, madam", he answered, "is entirely up to you."

That's where it lies. It is up to us: to you and me and 200,000,000 other Americans. The preservation of freedom and liberty is a task assigned to each generation and in our day it has become a most difficult task: one which I fear too many people are unwilling to undertake. And so, partly because we celebrate the independence and existence of our nation this week, and partly because I believe it is one of the major issued to which all men of good will need to address themselves, I invite you this morning to think with me about Freedom - about our nation in the Year of our Lord 1,974 - about the theological implications of responsible patriotism.

I think the topic is particularly important today because of the phychic trauma of all that goes under the name "Watergate." Somehting is happening to us: something destructive, I believe. Call it a loss of confidence; loss of trust; cynicism; apathy. Call it whatever you want, one thing is clear to me and it is that the corporate attitude of the American people about their system of government is changing. One simple illustration: I have tried desparately, as a father, to imbue my children with respect for the political process in general and for politicans specifically. One of the most intense disagreements I've ever had with a friend occurred because he taught his three year old to say "Dirty Johnson": while I was insisting that President Johnson's opponent be addressed - by my children - as Senator Goldwater. In my house it is "President Nixon". But that's not easy anymore. And I think we are in trouble at that precise point.

And so I believe it's important to think about it: to acknowledge where we are: and particularly as Christians - as people who stand in a tradition that has strong political implications, regardless of how strenously the right wing ~~denies~~ denies it - to bring to our time - and to the issue - the best resources and the sharpest intelligence at our disposal.

I think we might begin by being honest about who we are and what we are as a people. There seems to be a stronger than normal need in the American psyche to feel that our nation has always beenright and good: to translate every military victory into a victory of good over evil: to be essentially

incapable of admitting to our fallibility.

In an excellent article in the recent edition of A.D., Michael Novak submits that "Sentimental self-deception is America's radical sin," ~~and suggests that we be honest about our own history.~~ (See page 18) Novak relates that when his grandparents came to America in 1879 they had to resort to bribery in order to get a job in the steel mill. And that for the vast majority of Southern European immigrants life in America began with that kind of experience.

Novak goes on to point out that a midwest farmer must acknowledge that his land once belonged to Indians and that he exists as a farmer only because of an infamous national policy called "manifest destiny" - or - "the only good Indian is a dead Indian."

In the South an entire economy and way of life was built on slavery.

Now Novak does not suggest, nor do I, that these facts about us make us an evil nation. They are simply the truth, and part of living comfortably today is to acknowledge that our nation has not always been right and pure. It has behaved no worse than many other nations - and on many occassions considerably better: but there is nothing gained by hiding behind a facade of self-righteousness.

In fact, one of the basic principlie of this Rebpublic is a hard headed realism about the nature of man. Novak puts it in these terms:

> "The secret wisdom of our founders in 1789 was that they did not trust the goodness of the American people, their elected representatives, the courts, the press, or the President. They didn't trust anybody. American Democreacy is built on the premise that human beings are too corrupt to trust." (A.D.P.21)

Integrity about oursleves is where an intelligent patriotism might begin. Integrity also about the ways this nation has desparately tried to act out of noble ideals. For in spite of the truth about ourselves we continue to exhibit a conscience. Allow me please to refer to last Summer. The school master in our Scottish village was a loyal Scot but an

unapplogetic lover of America. In a discussion of love - he cited our county - our sacrifices on European soil in two World Wars, our immense amounts of aid to rebuild, our responsiveness to suffering and hunger in the world. He was right. Unequalled in the history of the world this nation has given and given and given. Sometimes not enough: somtimes for the wrong reasons and to the wrong people. Bur life has been preserved because of a strong and unrelenting American conscience.

Novak's point,and I think he is right, is that our time makes a romanticized, sentimentalized patriotism impossible. And we will be saved from cynicism simply by being a little more honest. Our system is based on realism about man.

That realism, I would sub mit is a product of the Judeo-Christian tradition. From the beginning we have been in trouble with governments. Men in power have consistantly taken freedom from people - and standing against tyrants of all sorts and stripes more often than not has been a Jew or a Christian - or the Church - although not often enough in the latter case.

The Old Testament Lesson this morning happened early in Israelite history — 750 B .C. ~~Jeroboam~~ Jeroboam was King and it was a time of peace and prosperity - but all was not well: the rich were exploiting the poor: Justice and fair play were reserved for the ~~affluent~~ affluent. Along came the prophet Amos - speaking out of a deep love for his nation and a deep commitment to the idea of equal justice. What he said offended the government. One of the King's priests told Jeroboram, "Amos is conspiring against you - the country cannot bear what he is saying." And to Amos he said" Be off - Off with you to Judah....never phophecy at Bethel, for this is the King's sanctuary."

The New Testament Lesson takes place 800 years later in Jerusalem. The government was Roman. A man by the name of Simon Peter got himself arrested for teaching something about the ~~sovereignty~~ sovereignty of Jesus Christ. The government ordered him to stop on the grounds that what he was saying

was subversive - which, in fact, it was if Ceasar is sovereign. When he was arrested a second time he was told: "We expressly ordered you to desist - and what has happened? You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching." To which Peter responded with characteristic bluntness, "We must obey God rather than men."

Amos was exiled. Peter was flogged for that statement and eventually executed. But together their stories demonstrate the basic Judeo-Christian political stance. "We must obey God rather than men."

1650 years later the men who gathered in Westminister to write the definitive Presbyterian theological statement said it eloquently : "God alone is Lord of the Consciences." ~~And in our time men have been called on to make that affirmation in the most dangerous of circumstances. Martin Niemoller, for instance, who used his pulpit to warn against the evil of Nazism, and who was instrumental in writing the Barmen Confession, and who was in prison [illegible] from 1937 to 1945.~~ That is the basis of all political and civil liberty.

The point of all this is that the United States of America was founded on the principle that no government has the right to infringe on the God given rights of its citizens - particularly the sanctity of conscience. That's the ~~genuine~~ genius and the beauty of our land. It is also the point at which our system is terribly vulnerable. For the individual conscience is the cite of the most fragile and most important freedom of all.

How then to be a patriot responsibly? How to preserve liberty in our day?

First - by being grateful for what is good about America. We don't have to be apologetic nor defensive about it. I think we can and ought to be grateful for the standard of living our system has engendered. I think we ought to be grateful that we slept last night without fear: that we can buy two papers this morning - one of which supports the President and the other of which demands his resignation. I [illegible] think we can and ought to give thanks that in November we will vote. I think we can and ought to be grateful for the incredible beauty and resources of this land.

I believe Patriotism begins with gratitude.

Second, I believe patriotism demands that men of intelligence be critical of their nation when it falls sort of its ideals. Because God alone is soverign - because our conscience belongs to him - we do not have to agree with everything our government does or says. To dissent is not to be disloyal. In fact it is to put in practice the highest ideal any government ever tried. Patriotism, at least of the American variety, submits its government to the most searching of criticism - publically, openly, and without fear. When the early Christians said "Jesus Christ is Lord" they were saying something (syberwise: they were saying) that their ultimate allegience belongs to him and not to the state. Our system allows that; invites it; and is built upon it. Patriotism demands that you and I acknowledge that - and never be willing to sacrifice it.

Fimally, patriotism demands involvement. Particularly now, in the midst of a growing cynicism. The recent primary election in this county was a debacle. Only about 17% of us even bothered to vote: part of us had only a few choices to make once we got inside the voting machine. That's wrong: that's a failure of love for our system: that says that a lot of people don't really care.

Robert Kennedy put it eloquently

"If we fail to dare, if we do not try, the next generation will harvest the fruit of our apathy - a world we did not want -a world we did not chose - but a world we could have made better..."

So this week, fly the flag: think about your country: Recall that, as a Christian your ultimate allegience is to Jesus Christ - and that the freedom to give that allegience to him is what it means to be an American.

Let us love our land: with a love that is grateful: a love that wants the nation to be more than it is: a love that sees the vision - the dream - the potential: a love that is willing to get involved - to care - to take part and be responsible.

Let us love our land with a love that is thankful and vigorous and honest. AMEN. ~~(PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING IN BULLETIN)~~